

clustering is reflected in two large landscape-scale sites which delineate a larger area for conservation: the 84,000-acre Foothills Megasite and, nested within it, the 55,000-acre South Mountains Macrosite. The South Mountains support the most extensive area of contiguous forests in the piedmont of the state, with natural communities that typically exist only in the Blue Ridge. They also contain Rich Cove Forests and several rock outcrop community types with unusual species composition and diversity due to influence on soil pH from mafic rock. They collectively support a large number of rare and uncommon plant and animal species, some of which are typically montane in distribution. The South Mountains Macrosite cluster is enhanced by good landscape connections to the northeast (within the Foothills Megasite) and westward to the Blue Ridge (across northern Rutherford County and southern McDowell County). The Foothills Megasite contains all of the South Mountains Macrosite cluster, as well as the Yellow Mountain\Ironmonger Mountain, Smith Mountain, Smith Cliff/Henry Fork River, and Hildebran Mountain standard sites. The Megasite is a very large area of mostly undeveloped, forested lands with a relatively low degree of fragmentation. It extends from the South Mountains proper northeast to near the Interstate 40 corridor near the community of Connelly Springs. The Foothills Megasite, with its constituent standard sites, offers potential for a larger system of linked natural areas than that which exists in the South Mountains Macrosite.